WORLD CHRONICLE

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PROGRAMME: **"WORLD CHRONICLE"**

GUEST: Ambassador Peter Hohenfellner, Chairman, Committee on Sanctions against Iraq

JOURNALISTS: Bruno Franseschi, Agence France-Presse
Raghida Dergham, Al-Hayat, London
Ian Williams, Al-Wasat, London

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

SYNOPSIS

SANCTIONS AGAINST IRAQ

Austria's UN Ambassador, Peter Hohenfellner who is in his second year as Chairman of the Committee on Sanctions Against Iraq observes that while sanctions are a painful process, they will continue until Iraq provides the requisite information on its nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and complies with other relevant Security Council resolutions. Meanwhile, there must be a balance between effectively administering sanctions and meeting the legitimate needs of Iraq's civilian population so as to lessen human suffering whenever possible.

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VOICE: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **WORLD CHRONICLE**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns and this is **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

In August 1990 the UN Security Council, responding to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, passed Resolution 661 imposing sanctions against Iraq. Though the sanctions pertained to the importation of basically everything but medical supplies, they've since been somewhat amended. The Security Council resolution also created the Committee on Sanctions against Iraq. Since January 1991 the committee chairman has been Peter Hohenfellner, Austria's Ambassador to the United Nations. Ambassador Hohenfellner is our guest today on **WORLD CHRONICLE**, and will be interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by Bruno Franceschi of Agence France-Presse; Raghida Dergham of Al-Hayat of London; and Ian Williams of Al-Wasat of London. Ambassador Hohenfellner, welcome to **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

Mr. Ambassador, the Iraqis have been driven out of Kuwait. Perhaps you could explain for the benefit of our audience why it's still necessary to maintain sanctions against Iraq.

LITTLEJOHNS: The Security Council is regularly reviewing the sanctions regime. It's absolutely clear that as long as Iraq has not completely complied with the sanctions regime there will be no lifting of sanctions. Actually, this is a process which is certainly a very painful one for Iraq, but on the other hand, it has to be understood that as long as the two main baskets, that means first of all the long-term monitoring of the weapons capacity, the providing of information on the nuclear, chemical and biological

weapons stocks, and the other provisions of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council have been complied with.

LITTLEJOHNS: What steps would have to be taken to lift sanctions? How would that be done?

HOHENFELLNER: Basically I think the open points we have until now, the preparedness of Iraq to comply with a long-term monitoring of the arms capacities; secondly, to provide all the necessary information as requested by the so-called Special Commission of the Security Council as far as nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons are concerned, missile capacities; thirdly, also to comply with the other provisions of the United Nations Security Council resolutions. I personally believe that once we come to real progress and a real preparedness of Iraq to comply with these provisions, basically these two baskets, then the lifting of sanctions may be taken into account.

LITTLEJOHNS: President Bush and Prime Minister Major of the United Kingdom have both indicated that they want sanctions to remain in place as long as Saddam Hussein is in power, although that of course is not covered in the Security Council resolutions. Is that a possibility, that these two powers could prevent the lifting of sanctions?

HOHENFELLNER: In the Security Council resolutions, as you mentioned yourself, there are no provision to deal with the leadership of Iraq. The Security Council resolutions first dealt with pressurizing Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait, and the second point was to destroy and to monitor as much as possible the arms capacities of Iraq. I have no intention at all to go into the specific views of leaders of powers in the United Nations, and of course of permanent members of the Security Council, but I think that it is very

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important to take into account that the Council sticks to the provisions of its own resolutions. I think one of the main points may be that Iraq, as we all know, is a country which is led by President Saddam Hussein, and to a certain degree it may be understandable that certain political leaders in the world identify the behaviour of Iraq with the behaviour of the leadership, which is quite logical. But I would say if Iraq is willing to comply with the sanctions review regime, which would request finally complying with the Security Council resolutions, we could lift the sanctions. But you are right in the sense that the five permanent members, as we all know, have veto power. These are the rules of the game and they could, of course, exclude the lifting of sanctions. But this is hypothetical at this stage.

FRANCESCHI: Mr. President, on humanitarian grounds, do you think your committee has enough means to respond appropriately to the basic needs of the Iraqi population? In other words, where is the border, the exact border between political and humanitarian considerations?

HOHENFELLNER: I would like to say that now in this nearly seventeenth month -- because I'm in my second year in chairing the Iraq Sanctions Committee -- it was my overriding interest to do whatever I could to satisfy the humanitarian needs of the population of Iraq. I was always convinced that, on the one hand, the Committee certainly has to control the application of the sanctions regime; but on the other hand, I found it equally, and I continue to find it enormously important that we do whatever we can to satisfy the legitimate civilian needs of the civilian population. That means, in other words, that we have on one hand the Security Council resolutions, which have, as you know, imposed on Iraq, a sanctions regime which is a very tough one. You have an air embargo, you have a naval embargo, you have a complete economic embargo on imports and

exports. On the other hand, it's absolutely clear that we have to avoid whatever could be avoided as far as human suffering is concerned. And that was my main point.

Now, there are three points and three steps which we could take under my chairmanship and where I believe that it was important in the sense of responding to the humanitarian needs of women, of children, of the vulnerable, of groups of the Iraqi society. The first step we took was in March 1991 when the Committee decided to introduce a simplified notification procedure which allows us to respond to requests of import of foodstuff to do this in a very simple way of taking note. We introduced the second procedure, which is the so-called "no objection procedure", and the no-objection procedure concerned all other goods which could be of relevance for the civilian needs of the population but were not necessarily foodstuffs or medical supplies. I want to underline in this context that medicaments itself are already exempted from the sanctions regime according to 661.

Now, this all sounds relatively complicated but in practice it worked very well. If you look at the daily work of the Committee's chairman, it's clear that the notification procedure works simply, easily, and efficiently. In the no-objection procedure framework, we had of course, as the Committee's working on a consensus basis, so theoretically on the basis of fifteen vetoes in comparison with the Security Council, that means each and every member has to agree. Which makes the work much more difficult. On the other hand, it inspires in a certain way the thinking of the members of the Committee to find better and more rational ways to make the Committee work more efficiently. So in the no-objection procedure framework, we had of course all kinds of experiences: we had experiences with possible double use, possible multiple use of goods which would be imported to Iraq, and it was clear that this is

-- if one member of the Committee interprets a certain item as a possible double use or multiple use item -- chemical warfare, etc. -- then we could not go ahead with that. In principle it didn't work so badly but it was clear that the so-called no-objection procedure constituted a certain problem and the problem was that you could not necessarily respond very efficiently to the needs of the population. So in December last year the non-aligned countries of the Security Council proposed to have some sort of transfer of a certain group of goods that they believed should be simply notified to the Committee. Let me give you one example: education.

LITTLEJOHNS: You mean books and materials ...

HOHENFELLNER: Books, pencils, all kinds of school supplies, for instance. Another example: basics like for instance blankets, shirts, boots, all these things which are not foodstuff but are so important for human life. Now, in this framework we negotiated very intensively. We had basically two schools of thinking. One school was the rather restrictive one saying we are not inclined to take, let's say, a more flexible view to all these goods as long as Iraq is not inclined to comply fully with the resolutions. We want to maintain the pressure on Iraq. And there was another important school of thinking, and they included the non-aligned countries, the representatives of Third World countries, saying, but we cannot make the civilian population hostage of the leadership of Iraq. If the leadership of Iraq wants to continue this tough line why make women and children and the other vulnerable groups, like handicapped and old people, hostage?

So, I had a very difficult time in this month starting with January 1992, but we came to a good result, we came to a compromise, which is a certain characteristic of this committee, that this difficult procedure of having fifteen vetoes inspires a

certain preparedness for compromise. So we came to a compromise solution. We took out what the non-aligneds proposed to transfer to the notification procedure, and we said let's agree in principle that we have a favourable look at this group without taking it out of the no-objection procedure. That means these goods -- education, clothing, blankets, etc. -- stay in principle in the no-objection procedure, but members of the committee agreed to consider these with a favourable look. Of course, if there is the risk of double use, multiple use, or something like that, each and any member of the committee can of course object to that.

LITTLEJOHNS: The programme is **WORLD CHRONICLE.** Our guest is Ambassador Peter Hohenfellner, Chairman of the Iraq Sanctions Committee.

DERGHAM: I have a series of follow-up questions if you would permit me, and since there's about ten of them, in answering both my colleagues' questions. First of all, as to the Committee, with all due respect, there are fifteen members, basically ambassadors -- maybe not all on the level of ambassadors -- who would sit and discuss whether ping pong balls or badminton rackets could qualify under the sanctions regime. It's fifteen important people sitting, wasting hours to decide whether this sort of thing could be allowed into Iraq or not. Teddy bears; we understand the famous story of teddy bears are dangerous. But how could you justify the work of this committee and the dogmatic interpretation whereas you have had two teams by the United Nations, one called the Ahtisaari team and the other one the Prince Sadruddin Agha Khan team, and they both concluded the situation was very dangerous. It's an epidemic, they said. And then you're busy talking about ping pong balls!

HOHENFELLNER: I have a very simple first answer to you. The United Nations bodies, including the Sanctions Regime Committee, cannot be

better than the members of the committee. Right? And that means you should not blame the body in itself if certain members of the committee take a certain position in this committee. As I told you, it's a consensus committee. So you can never overstep the position of one or two or three countries if they take a specific attitude vis-a-vis specific articles. You are right. There was an application for ping pong balls. In the discussions, your point of view was very clearly represented by quite a number of countries, who said sports is something, and it's ping pong, it is not lawn tennis. So it should be a necessity for the physical health of young people. It should be allowed. But there was another opinion represented by two countries, and they said we don't believe that this is an essential civilian need. Now, there we are. You see the difficulties.

DERGHAM: Yes, but do you also see my point, Mr. Ambassador? Here is this committee giving itself the right, this ultimate right to decide what is essential for a people's recreation, a people who is under, if you wish, the house arrest of this committee. The food has got to go through you, you would decide if this food could be allowed or not. Even the recreation activity you just mentioned, pencils and books. Who gives anybody this sort of authority if it is not as I understand that, if the Sanctions Committee is to prevent military equipment, that sort of thing? Of course I understand. But civilian use? Why do you feel you can have so much authority? Why are you so dogmatic in interpreting a sanctions regime to the extent that you give yourself this ultimate right, which probably no one should have?

HOHENFELLNER: I think you touched on a very important subject and I tell you quite frankly that this is one of the worries I have all the time I'm chairing the committee. I'm faced in the committee clearly with two schools of thinking. One school of thinking says

basically what you say; we should be rather open minded as far as humanitarian needs are concerned. We should interpret the possibilities of facilitating such deliveries rather generously. But there is another school of thinking and this school of thinking says the pressure on Iraq should be maintained as long as there's not full compliance with the resolutions. And there's another point. We are not abrogating authority, we are the sub-body of the Security Council. Of course, in the membership, we are identical with the Security Council. By the way, we are not always ambassadors there. I mean ...

DERGHAM: It's irrelevant. You represent the governments.

HOHENFELLNER: ... I'm chairing the committee itself, it doesn't really count. On the contrary, I believe that young diplomats work more or less as efficiently as ambassadors. This may be unorthodox what I say but it's important. Now, I have a second point. What you have to understand, I'm not defending the committee's decision, but you must understand the committee's decision is an enormously difficult process which finally has to go between skill and correctness. On one hand, the fifteen votes required, the unanimity, on the other hand, the necessity to reconcile positions. And these together, always under the overriding necessity -- and you may be sure of that -- that humanitarian needs should be satisfied. And you may be sure that this is my overriding aim.

DERGHAM: Forgive me, Michael, just one other follow-up if I may on your question earlier on about the position of President Bush and Prime Minister Douglas Hurd of ...

LITTLEJOHNS: Prime Minister Major.

DERGHAM: Major, excuse me. Thank you. Anyhow, how can one trust the committee's commitment? I do not mean this to be a personal attack on you at all but when you describe to us how difficult it is to arrive at anything as simple as ping pong balls or pencils, how can the international community trust that you can arrive at your commitment to lift the sanctions should there be total compliance by Iraq of what's demanded rather than taking the point of President Bush and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom that would out-weigh the other members' point of view? Can you give such a commitment or do you want to leave it open and see what happens when they comply?

HOHENFELLNER: I think the committee's in development and I don't want to come back to national positions of political leaders of countries of the Security Council. This is not my business and you must understand that but I think if you look at the developments in the committee since the beginning of 1991, the committee developed, it became more pragmatic, it became more open-minded, I could convince the members of the committee that we have to be flexible. You are right, and I agree with you, that we are not yet on the point where we are as efficiently responding as it may be necessary according to certain people like you and many, many others who say that. And I am open-minded on that, but I'm not pessimistic. I believe personally that we can in the future still be more pragmatic, more flexible. The basic problem we cannot resolve, and that's a lifting of sanctions. That's up to the Council. Now, you may say, but please, Mr. Ambassador, you are in the Council as well and at this stage the Council President, and I have a sanctions review possibly in my time of May -- you know the presidents of the Council are rotating according to the English alphabet. But I think as far as the Committee's concerned we can further develop, and you may be sure that whatever I can do I will do on this sector. You know my basic line. As far as the sanctions regime is concerned and

the Council is concerned, in my introductory notes I said it may very much depend on the last very important questions, like long-term monitoring of the arms capacities, like giving the detailed information as required by the Special Commission, like complying possibly also with Resolutions 706 and 712, that means this famous oil for food procedure as provided in the Security Council resolutions. So that is a point which is important as far as the sanctions regime is concerned. The committee itself will further develop, I'm sure of that.

WILLIAMS: I think we're nibbling around the point. When the sanctions were first imposed we were told that they were ineffective and that was why armed action was taken. And since then we've now had seventeen months or whatever it is of sanctions, most of which seem to be not very effective. The Baath regime, Saddam Hussein, his cronies, the military, seem to be doing very well by all accounts. The people are suffering. In the words of I think a Belgian organization called "Medicine for the Third World" came back and said that the children of Iraq are prisoners of the sanctions. One of the means for this, I think one of the complaints, was that chemicals for water purification and chemicals for the manufacture of anesthetics had been held up under dual use objections. So something like 50% of the water is unpurified, containing sewage, possibly leading to dysentery. How does this square with what the sanctions are about? This is stuff that actually harms -- the reports of the children of Iraq -- and does absolutely nothing to Saddam Hussein and his regime.

HOHENFELLNER: Right. Well, to answer the specific questions before I come to the principal one, the specific question on water purification, I may say that the overwhelming majority of requests for imports of chlorine, basics for water purification, have been permitted by the committee. This is a very important point. I'm

aware that in certain cases of water purification basics, there were problems with double use, that's right but the mainstream requests were all permitted by the committee. I want to be absolutely clear on that. So it is of course within this framework -- I'm not a specialist for water purification -- but I know that the specialized agencies like UNICEF, like WHO and so on, are doing enormous work in Iraq, which is not of course completely satisfactory because they are over-strained. That's another important point, that the humanitarian agencies in Iraq are clearly at the limits of their capacities because of lack of financial resources. That's a very important point which doesn't touch the Sanctions Committee but which is an important phenomenon which we have to take into account. But you may always witness -- I'm not defending this point -- but you may witness that certain chemical products may from time to time come into, let's say, a closer check by committee members. What's interesting is that we have now a little bit -- and as this inspires a little bit my optimism for the future -- we have insofar developed as not -- you have not automatically a blockage of certain requests. In many cases certain members of the committee say, well, just put it on hold, request further information of the chemical composition for instance, or the chemical composition of the goods, and then come back and permit re-export or the import of these goods.

This is the specific point on water purification. As far as the general point is concerned again, we are before the political dilemma. On one hand you have the sanctions regime, we have seen all these reports, which were very pertinently quoted by Mrs. Dergham before. We had the Saddruddin report, we had before the Ahtisaari report, we had, and we still have and receive reports by humanitarian agencies, and you have clearly the dilemma between on the one hand the problems of the civilian population -- I call them specifically the problems of the most vulnerable groups of the society, children, women, aged people, handicapped people -- and on

the other hand the sanctions regime. I believe personally that in the committee we are clearly going a way where we try -- and that's for the list, the wish of the chairman who is in the hands of the other fourteen members, and there I have to be clear. I cannot act on my own. I'm not in any way defending my position but it's an objective fact that the chairman of the committee depends on consensus, is in the hands of the members. But he can of course persuade them. That I see as my primary task, try to work as much as possible with individual members. And I don't want to say how many hours I spend not in Conference Room 7 where we meet regularly, I meet with them individually and I try to talk to them.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Ambassador, our half-hour is up. Ambassador Hohenfellner, that's all the time we have. Thank you for joining us on this edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

Our guest has been Ambassador Peter Hohenfellner, Chairman of the Committee on Sanctions against Iraq. He was interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by Bruno Franceschi of Agence france-Presse; Raghida Dergham of Al-Hayat of London; and Ian Williams of Al-Wasat of London.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

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